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INFO RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 1694
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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2071
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3143
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2837
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0052
RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 0283
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0855
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0074
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ULAANBAATAR 000033

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STATE FOR EAP/CM, EAP/K, PRM/ANE, G/SNK AND PRM FOR RYAN AND RUSCH

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SUBJECT: UNHCR PLANS TWO NEW DPRK SHELTERS IN MONGOLIA

Classified By: Ambassador Mark C. Minton for Reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: At the request of Mongolia's Border Force, UNHCR is planning to establish two new shelters in eastern Mongolia for DPRK refugees, UNHCR Senior Regional Protection Officer Nai Jit Lam told us on January 23. Lam said the two shelters will each cost around \$35,000, contain 25 to 30 beds, and be situated near the Chinese border, in the towns of Halhgal and Erdenetsagaan. Lam added that a separate planned shelter, to be set up near Ulaanbaatar and operated jointly by the Border Force and the General Intelligence Agency, was experiencing construction delays. Originally slated to open in September, it was now scheduled for an October 15 launch. He added that the joint shelter was running \$40,000 over budget. Lam said three North Koreans ruled out for resettlement by South Korea are effectively stateless, and asked whether the USG would consider admitting them as refugees. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) At the request of Mongolia's Border Force, UNHCR is planning to establish two new shelters in eastern Mongolia for DPRK refugees, UNHCR Senior Regional Protection Officer Nai Jit Lam told Econ/Pol Chief on January 23. Lam, based in Beijing, said the two shelters will each cost around \$35,000, contain 25 to 30 beds, and be situated near the Chinese border, in the towns of Halhgal and Erdenetsagaan. North Korean refugees were already entering Mongolia through these points, he said. (Note: Although the number of North Koreans entering Mongolia for resettlement elsewhere dropped from 653 in 2006 to around 488 in 2007, Lam said the new shelters are necessary because the existing Border Force regional shelters, in the cities of Choibalsan and Zamyn Uud, are crowded and rudimentary. End Note.)

JOINT SHELTER RUNNING BEHIND SCHEDULE...

¶3. (C) Lam said that a joint refugee shelter, to be set up near Ulaanbaatar and operated by the Border Force and the General Intelligence Agency, was experiencing construction

delays. Originally slated to open in September, it was now scheduled for an October 15 launch. Lam said Foreign Ministry official Altangeral (of the Law and Treaty Department) attributed the delay, in part, to a harsh winter.

The ground will stay frozen longer than expected, he explained, and until the ground has thawed, it will be impossible to pour concrete for the foundation of the 100-120 bed facility. Altangeral added that builders have had trouble importing necessary supplies (like other companies amid the ongoing construction boom).

... AND OVER BUDGET

14. (C) Altangeral informed Lam of anticipated cost overruns related to the joint shelter. Construction was budgeted at around \$260,000 but would now likely run \$300,000, Lam said. Lam said Altangeral blamed sharp price increases of construction materials, which he said have recently doubled. (Note: Post has reported on rising construction costs, and Econoff noted that the price of concrete has soared, perhaps doubling over the past year. End Note.)

FOUR NORTH KOREANS REJECTED BY ROK

15. (C) Lam then turned to the issue of four North Koreans who entered Mongolia seeking resettlement in South Korea: two who came in September 2006 and two in June 2007. Lam disclosed that one recently admitted being a Chinese citizen and said she planned to withdraw her refugee application. Lam said the GOM and the Chinese Government planned to address the

ULAANBAATA 00000033 002 OF 002

issue bilaterally, and that Lam did not see any obstacle to the woman's eventual return to China.

16. (C) The other three North Koreans, Lam said, have been rejected by South Korea, and are effectively stateless. He said that in the past, all three had received North Korean passports from the DPRK Consulate in Shenyang and acquired Chinese foreign residency permits. (Two still possess these documents, while the third allegedly left them behind in China.) Lam said he intended to press the ROK Government to admit the three, but failing that, asked whether the USG would consider admitting them as refugees. He said all three had openly admitted wanted to resettle for purely economic reasons. Econ/Pol Chief noted that under the U.S. system, DHS officers determine who is qualified for refugee status, and that Post would quickly move on any formal request from UNHCR.

TRAINING FOR IMMIGRATION OFFICERS

17. (SBU) Lam said that later on January 23, the UNHCR would hold a training session for Mongolian immigration officers on asylum seekers and refugees. He did not provide details of the training. He added that UNHCR was discussing refugee-related "regional study tours" for officials of Mongolia's Foreign and Justice Ministries, and that this idea had been well received. (A likely venue was the Philippines, Lam said.)

COMMENT

18. (C) We find it puzzling that UNHCR would offer regional study tours to refugee-focused GOM officials. Given the GOM's admirable track record of treating and processing DPRK refugees competently and humanely, perhaps the UNHCR should consider inviting officials of other Asian governments to take a study tour of Mongolia. It is possible that the proposed tours are either an enticement for Mongolia to sign on to the Refugee Convention, which Foreign Ministry officials have said Mongolia plans to do "soon," or a

de-facto reward for positive engagement on DPRK refugees. Regarding the joint shelter, a one-month delay may not seem overly troubling but it has us alarmed. By mid-October it is already so cold in Mongolia that construction work slows down and becomes much more difficult. If the facility is not completed by then, chances are it will not accommodate refugees until March 2009. END COMMENT.
MINTON